

From the Office of Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz

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For Immediate Release

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STATE SEEKS FEDERAL ELECTION MONIES

Most funds earmarked for new voting machines

Secretary of the State Susan Bysiewicz submitted an application Tuesday to the federal government requesting funding being allocated to states under the "Help America Vote Act" (HAVA), authored by Connecticut Senator Christopher Dodd in response to the voting debacle in Florida during the 2000 presidential election.

"As we continue to work to improve the integrity and efficiency of our election process, it is important that we seize this historic opportunity to receive federal assistance with this effort," said Bysiewicz, who applied for the monies electronically via the Internet. "It is prudent to maximize all federal funds available, particularly in tough budget times."

This first request totals \$6.7 million with about half that amount designated for new voting systems and the remainder for poll worker training, updated voter registration materials and completion of the state's centralized voter registration system. Bysiewicz estimates that Connecticut will eventually receive up to \$33 million from the \$1.5 billion HAVA appropriation, with the majority of those funds to be used for new voting machines.

HAVA requires all states to update their voting systems by 2006 to meet new standards such as providing persons with disabilities the opportunity to vote privately and independently. According to the state Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities, over 200,000 Connecticut citizens with disabilities may not vote.

"Electronic voting technology can help ensure that persons with disabilities are afforded equal opportunity to cast private, independent ballots," said Bysiewicz. "Voter participation in the state could increase significantly through the use of new technology."

Mechanical lever voting machines have been used almost exclusively in Connecticut for over 50 years, but are no longer manufactured and do not currently comply with the new federal standards. With the application, Bysiewicz certified the state's intent to replace the current fleet of 3,300 lever machines.

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Governor George Pataki of New York has also recommended replacing his state's lever machines, leaving Connecticut with the possibility of being the only state left that is completely reliant on lever voting systems. Bysiewicz also noted that advocacy groups are looking into testing the constitutionality of lever machines in federal court, which could force Connecticut to replace its voting systems regardless of federal funding.

The Connecticut General Assembly recently approved a proposal by Bysiewicz to try out new electronic voting systems during municipal elections on November 4, 2003. "In order to find the best voting system for our future, it is important to first determine which technology proves most reliable and what voters think of the various systems," she said.

The Election Day test of new voting systems will be done at no cost to taxpayers using equipment loaned free of charge by vendors. Bysiewicz plans to conduct the test in at least three towns of various populations, utilizing different technologies in each municipality that volunteers.

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